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AUTHOR Thomas, Dene Kay
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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed the interaction of one freshman composition teacher and four students who met for a series of six conferences during a freshman composition course. The conferences, which were taped and transcribed, provide evidence of the benefits of the conference method of teaching composition. Analysis of the data included identifying the processes of small group interaction, noting parallels between the group process and the writing process, and formulating an audience acquisition model that illustrates important components of students' writing development. Results of the analysis indicated that discussion focused on writing helps students make the transition from being speakers who are conversationally oriented to being writers who are aware of how other minds perceive the world and who can adapt their writing to the needs of an imagined audience. A 3-page reference list is included. (DF)

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A Transition from Speaking to Writing:

Small-Group Writing Conferences

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Dr. Sarah Warshauer Freedman

School of Education, Language and Literacy Division

University of California, Berkeley

Berkeley, California 94720

by

Dene Kay Thomas

Assistant Professor of English

Department of English

University of Idaho

Moscow, Idaho 83843

Office Phone: (208) 885-6362

Home Phone: (208) 882-4321

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A Transition from Speaking to Writing:
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Abstract

Theories of group behavior from speech communication and theories of discourse from linguistics, when intersected for the purpose of analyzing small-group writing conferences, provide a framework for studying the transition from speaking to writing. Descriptive research, combining analytical methods from both disciplines, provides insights into communication patterns, changes in communication patterns, motivations for the changes, and, finally, into the relationship between the group process and the writing process.

This descriptive case study analyzes the interaction of one freshman composition teacher and four students who met for a series of six conferences which were part of a freshman composition course at the University

The conferences, taped and transcribed, provide evidence for the benefits of the conference method of teaching composition. This study describes the group process, suggests parallels between the group process and the writing process, and provides an audience acquisition model that illustrates important components of students' writing development. Discussion that is focused on writing helps freshmen make the transition from speakers who are conversationally oriented to writers who are aware of how other minds perceive the world and who can adapt their writing to the needs of an imagined audience.

A Transition from Speaking to Writing:
Small-Group Writing Conferences

This study describes and analyzes the interaction of four freshman writers and their teacher as they participated in six small-group writing conferences that were part of the regular freshman composition course at the University of Minnesota. The very nature of teaching students to communicate in writing suggests that it would be more effective to have students doing a substantial amount of communicating, functioning as speakers and listeners, writers and audience, reinforcing the fact that communication is two-directional. Conversation abouot writing may provide a bridge between speaking and writing somewhat analogous to that which inner speech provides between thought and speech. This study begins with the assumption that small groups are an effective means of teaching writing, an approach supported by evidence from teachers, theorists, and researchers in several disciplines. The purpose of this study is to learn more about what actually happens in small groups.

A large body of evidence indicates that learning groups constitute a powerful pedagogy and that they promote the most effective form of learning--active and experiential. One principle of using speaking to teach writing finds support from Jerome Bruner (1966), a learning theorist who believes that learning begins with the familiar and moves on only after making connection with the known. Many students come into freshman composition as conversationalists, knowing how to use the spoken language, but often they find it difficult to make the transition from speaking to writing, identify their own assumptions about communication, and become motivated. Small-group writing conferences can address these difficulties. Involvement that comes with learning in groups leads to attitude change (Altman and McGinnies, 1960). Attitude change is the cognitive and the affective heart of all other learning objectives, which include motivation, problem solving (including the approach

to the rhetorical situation--writer's stance, audience reaction, subject), skill building (including hierarchical thinking, expanding and organizing information, expanding short term memory, style, syntactic fluency), and content mastery (including the conventions of writing, such as the rules of grammar and mechanics, spelling, library use, and appropriate formats).

Many arguments for the use of groups in the teaching of writing have already been made. Small-group writing conferences have been popular with composition theorists and teachers for some time, although the reasons and methods for using them vary (Moffett, 1968; Murray, 1968; Macrorie, 1970; Elbow, 1973; Bruffee, 1980). Evidence from research on writing supports the idea that writing courses are particularly well suited to learning groups, although the focus of the studies varies from quality of writing to attitudes about writing (Lagana, 1973; Benson, 1979; Fox, 1980; Elias, 1982). Writing theorists and teachers also emphasize the importance of using speaking to make the transition to writing (Moffett, 1968; Zoellner, 1969). Vygotsky (1962) adds support when he mentions writing as a "higher-order abstraction" than speaking. But two specific concerns, the objectives and the structure of the small-group writing conference, still need to be addressed. Theories of discourse and theories of group behavior respond to these concerns.

Writers benefit from small-group writing conferences in two major ways: they clarify their intentions by speaking and they gain an internalized sense of audience by listening. Speech-act theory explains some of the ways in which writers clarify intentions. Language in use involves intentions beyond referring and predicating (Austin, 1962); all use of language is a rule-governed activity (Searle, 1969); speakers expect other speakers to be cooperative (Grice, 1975). The four maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle include quantity (say enough but not too much), quality (say what is true and

what you have evidence for), relation (be relevant), and manner (be brief, clear, and orderly). When problems occur in writing, they often come from a clash between two maxims, only one of which can be fulfilled--an inability, as Linda Flower states (1980), to "juggle constraints." In isolation, the writer must clarify intentions, posit the audience, and imagine reactions. Vygotsky (1962) notes that the lack of an immediate audience contributes to poor motivation and a that a lack of ability to plan using abstract thinking causes most people to develop writing skills more slowly than they develop speaking skills.

Theories of group behavivor and studies of group processes can provide a basis for determining the validity of the claims and intuitions of composition teachers concerning groups. Speech-communication researchers have discovered much about small-group interaction, leadership, structure, and affect that can be applied to the small-group writing conference. They find that successful groups are cohesive, operate in two areas (task and maintenance), need time to build trust, and exhibit both primary and secondary tension (Bales, 1950; Cartwright and Zander, 1968; Bormann, 1975; Shaw, 1976). A democratic style of leadership is most effective for small groups (Hare, 1962; Stogdill, 1974). The group process tends to take a spiral pattern, with an idea introduced, discussed, and elaborated upon or modified until a new idea is introduced and the process begins again (Scheidel and Crowell, 1964). The complexity of group interaction rises dramatically as the size of the group increases. With a group of three, there are 6 possible relationships, while with 5 there are 90 and with 7 there are 966 (Palazzolo, 1981). According to Brilhart (1967), five is the optimum number for problem-solving groups, groups which often solve problems more effectively than individuals working alone.

Using research from composition, discourse theory, and speech-communication, this study addresses three questions:

1. What actually happens in small-group writing conferences?
2. How do small-group writing conferences affect the students?
3. What is the relationship between the small-group writing conference and the writing process?

METHOD

Context

Small-group writing conferences are a regular part of freshman composition at the University. A five-credit, one-quarter course, freshman composition is designed to move from personal to transactional writing, with a focus first on personal experience and invention techniques, then on organization and analysis, and finally on audience and evaluation. Each paper uses and builds on the skills of the preceding papers. The assignments are open-ended, designed to function as starting points for the student to create a rhetorical situation. The assignments students in the study responded to were as follows:

1. The first assignment asked students to write from their memory of past events, starting with something that bothered them. The main invention technique was Young, Becker, and Pike's (1970) particle-wave-field heuristic.
2. The second assignment asked students to write about an "alien culture"--a place that was strange to them--and to analyze that culture in order to understand it. The instructor used Linda Flower's (1981) method of organizing by means of drawing trees to help students bring order to their observations. The students used Flower's Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing as their text. All four students in each conference group were required as a group to spend at least an hour in the same place, observing and taking notes that could later be used as the basis for their papers.
3. The third assignment asked students to write a review on a subject of their choice. This assignment focused on audience considerations. Students in their groups identified their audience and discussed that audience's level

of knowledge, attitudes, and interest.

Participants

Teacher. Since I started with the assumption that small-group writing conferences are an effective pedagogical technique that we need to learn more about, I wanted an excellent teacher, one who used groups in teaching and who was aware of the background theory and research. I chose Michael, judged by peers, supervisors, and students to fit the criteria. His teaching methods follow good writing principles which he has individualized to fit his own teaching style. I wanted to study an effective writing group, and starting with an effective teacher provided the best means to do so. While his style will never be repeated, a case study of one effective teacher working with one group provides a basis from which to generalize to good behavior on the part of other writing groups.

Students.

The four students (whom I will call Amy, Becky, Ken, and Sharon) were not chosen for any particular attributes, but because they met with the teacher at a time that was convenient for me. I went to the first group meeting and received the students' permission to tape the group sessions and to study their writing. The students were typical University freshmen, eighteen and nineteen years of age. Three were from suburban and one was from a small town in. Amy and Becky were very talkative, while Ken and Sharon were relatively quiet.

Small-Group Writing Conferences

The small-group writing conferences consisted of four students and the teacher. Six student conferences supplemented and partially replaced classroom time. Students met for two conferences on each of the three papers they wrote--a prewriting conference and a drafting conference. For each conferen-

ce, students made four photocopies of their writing and gave each group member a copy during the class held two days before the conference. Group members were to read each other's writing, write comments on it, and come to the conference prepared for discussion. Since the conferences were scheduled for one class hour, each writer received 12-15 minutes of discussion time. The conference structure was simple: writer talks (introducing, explaining, asking for help), group talks (open discussion), writer talks (summarizing).

Data Collection

Observation. I observed conferences 1, 2, 3, and 5. Conferences 4 and 6 were held in the classroom with the teacher circulating among all the groups.

Transcriptions. I taped and transcribed all the conferences, including false starts, repetitions of words, and interruptions in the transcripts. Using a method similar to that of Labov and Fanshel (1977), I indicated a pause within a section of discourse by two means: if it seemed deliberate, I used a comma. If it seemed to be unplanned, I used two periods. I did not indicate the length of a pause.

Interviews. After each conference I talked informally with the students and the teacher. I also interviewed them at the end of the quarter. The purpose of the student interviews was to find out what their attitudes toward writing were, what their perceptions of themselves as writers were, and how they perceived the group conferences. The purpose of the interviews with the teacher was to discover his teaching methods, his goals specific to each conference, and his impressions of each of the students, their writing, and their participation in the group.

Writing. During the quarter, students gave me a copy of the writing they gave the group. After the quarter was over they gave me their journals, notebooks, and papers.

Analysis of Data

My process for analyzing the data was two-fold, working top down by imposing a classification scheme on the transcripts and working bottom up by looking for patterns emerging from the data.

Group Process. A method for examining the process of small-group writing conferences should provide for quantitative coding, account for all of the data, and identify patterns and changes in group interaction. Robert F. Bales' Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) provides such a systematic way to analyze small-group interaction. Bales' system for a quantitative coding of group interaction is divided into 12 categories that fit the two-part division of task and social-emotional functions (see Appendix A). The social-emotional area is divided into two parts (positive and negative) and these outer two parts frame the task area responses. The task area, also divided into two parts (attempted answers and questions), forms the middle section. These categories are set up in pairs, with (1) ("shows solidarity") having its opposite in (12) ("shows antagonism"). Positive reactions promote group cohesiveness. While negative reactions can lead to the development of problems, they are necessary if the group takes its task seriously. They often increase slightly in a cohesive group, indicating the move from primary tension (acting bored and polite) to secondary tension (becoming involved with the issues) that Bormann (1975) speaks of. The task area is where solutions to problems occur.

By social-emotional area, Bales does not mean interactions on unrelated topics; he is speaking to the force of the interactions. A comment such as "I thought your paper was good" could be functioning in both category 5 (gives opinion) and category 1 (shows solidarity). This drawback to the method is handled by favoring the category more distant from the middle since it indicates the stronger impact.

Units of analysis are considered in context, as initiations or responses. The unit of analysis for Bales is one act, or, as Bales calls it, "the smallest discriminable segment of verbal or nonverbal behavior . . . usually a subject and predicate, though one may be implied . . .a simple complete thought" (p. 137). I isolated each unit of interaction and assigned it to one of the categories, as illustrated in Appendix B. The slashes mark the units, and the numbers after the slashes indicate the category from Bales where I placed the unit. My analysis of the conferences was made by simultaneously listening to the tape and reading the transcript. When I completed the analysis of each conference, I totaled the responses that each group member made in each of the twelve categories. From these totals I calculated the percentage of responses that each group member made in each category (see Appendix C).

Affective Concerns. Here I used the transcripts to isolate role modeling techniques used by the teacher and imitated by the students. These included questioning techniques and Rogerian reflection. When Mike asks the group, "Should Becky put herself into the essay?" he is asking a different sort of question than when Becky asks Sharon, "What do you remember?" One asks for judgment based on reasoning; the other asks for recall of knowledge. Questions can suggest alternatives, focus attention, select information, present other perspectives, and clarify for the listener the viewpoint of the questioner--all skills needed for speaking and for writing. A good discussion question provides the basis for good discussion, stimulating and directing it. To evaluate the types of questions that were asked, I used Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (1956 and 1964). The technique of responding by means of repeating what has been said, either in the exact words or in paraphrase, is called Rogerian reflection. Not only an effective form of nondirective counseling, it has merit as a teaching device as well. For an

analysis of attitudes toward the writing groups, I also relied on my interviews with the participants and on the students' journals.

Relation Between Group Process and Text. Groups can work well in any class. The content would be defined differently, but the process could well be the same. Establishing the relationship between group process and text focuses on the purpose of the writing group as a means of achieving writing skills and strategies. To analyze this relationship I combined evidence from the transcripts of the conferences with the students' prewriting, rough drafts, and finished papers.

RESULTS

Group Process

Analysis of this group's process serves two purposes: it indicates significant patterns and changes when interpreted in light of small-group theory and it shows the forms taken by acts of reaction or anticipation. Both purposes can aid in our understanding of group behavior and thus better our chances of running effective small-group writing conferences. The analysis of the group process shows how it changes over time, and what the changes signify.

Patterns in the Group Interaction. While the group functions in both the task and social-emotional areas, the group spends more discussion time in the task area than in the social-emotional area. When functioning in the social-emotional area, the group gives a higher percentage of positive reactions than negative reactions. Students' personal characteristics remain stable and influence the group in much the same way throughout the series of conferences. Students repeat attitudes about themselves and their writing throughout the conferences, attitudes which they become increasingly aware of through group feedback. They frequently indicate this awareness by the

responses they make, talking about changes in attitude as they occur. For example, Becky expresses her initial dissatisfaction with a rough draft on people who place personal ads in a city paper, saying, "I'm getting bogged with.. grammar, kind of." After some discussion she changes the way she perceives the problem: "It really got kind of icky.. feeling.. like I was persecuting someone." Still later, she formulates a plan: "So I should include myself then."

Changes in the Patterns of Group Interaction. The group becomes cohesive. As their experiences develop into a common group history, they develop a common language; decrease the time spent orienting and informing; increase the time spent suggesting and questioning; and increase the time spent supporting, joking, agreeing, and disagreeing. Conversational turns become shorter, in proportion to an increase in statements of support and agreement such as, "Yeah," "Uh-huh," "That sounds really neat," and "I'd like to read that."

The group develops expectations that its members will play the same role; as a result, differentiated individual roles develop and stabilize. Students who talk a good deal continue to do so, although the time that they talk tends to decrease. Students who talk little continue to do so, although the time that they talk tends to increase.

Although the interaction profiles cannot completely account for the interactions of a given group, they can characterize that group. And a series of profiles on the same group can indicate change and the direction of change. A group of preschoolers, for example, showed a profile with negative reactions of 35% and positive reactions of 28%, for a total of 63% of the responses in the social-emotional area (Bales, 1950, p. 23). No one in that group asked for any opinions or for any expressions of feeling.

In contrast, there were no negative reactions in Mike's first conference and positive reactions were only 11%. Most of the reactions were in the task

area, with a high rate of giving information. By the last conference, positive reactions were at 31% and negative reactions were 6%, for a total of 37% of the responses in the social-emotional area. Question-asking increased from 4% in the first conference to 13% in the last one.

Responses in the task area always accounted for over half of the discussion, but they decreased steadily from 89% in the first conference to 63% in the last one. The overall pattern of interaction in the six conferences is typical for a discussion group dealing with referential topics. The change shows continual modification of that basic pattern with increasing responses in the social-emotional and question categories, indicating the increasing variety of responses. This is the development that small-group researchers (Cartwright and Zander, 1968; Shaw, 1971; Stogdill, 1974) tell us to expect from a group developing cohesiveness and thus working more effectively.

The extremely high percentage of interaction in the task area during the first conference was primarily in category 6 (gives orientation). The high percentage in this category is partly accounted for by the teacher's directions to structure the conference so that the writer talked first and explained the prewriting to the group. Although the group seemed friendly and cooperative, they did not know each other very well at the first conference, had had no time to develop trust, and as a result were not about to criticize. In the attempt to be polite, they gave almost no negative reactions. The students spent most of their time explaining their prewriting, with much attention to the past--what they had already done--and some to the future--what they were planning to do as they moved from prewriting to drafting. There were many more long stretches of monologue in the first conference than there were in later conferences. Later, there were more indications of support and cooperation, such as "Yeah," "I see," and "Uh-huh."

A comparison of all six group conferences shows that giving information and orientation steadily declines. This decline results in part from students building up a common history and needing to orient the others less. In the first conference, Amy gives a long explanation of her prewriting, often reading from the xeroxed sheet that everyone has a copy of: "Ahm, for the particle I just listed things. . .," and she goes on to read and explain the list. Later on, she assumes that the others understand her particle-wave-field lists. Students were also increasing their percentage of responses in the social-emotional area, in categories containing a higher risk. They agreed more, disagreed more, and were more supportive. They did not need the safety of neutral responses as much as they did in the beginning. In the last conference, in response to Sharon's paper, Becky says, "Rambling sentence, maybe." Sharon apologizes, "This is the rough draft. I've been just trying to get the general story." But Amy won't let her off so easily: "Hey, come on. We want to hack it apart, so let us go to it." And go to it they do.

Responses giving opinion (category 5) decline between the first and second conferences and then vary only slightly from conference to conference. The initial decline is associated with the decline in giving information (category 6). Students tended to alternate between giving opinions on their own writing and giving information about their own writing. At this early point they were functioning more as readers of their own texts than as readers of others. In later conferences, the opinions given focus with greater frequency on writing of others, an indication of the students' increasing attempts to function as readers and as critics of other writers' texts.

The students gave more suggestions (category 4) during drafting conferences than they did during prewriting conferences. This implies that it is easier to make suggestions when there is a draft to work from. Students took suggestions seriously. Becky, in conference 4, says, "That might be kind of

neat to put in." Amy responds, "What'd you say? Why? What?"

Over the series of six conferences, the number of questions that students asked increased, from a combined total of 4% in the first conference to 13% in the last conference. Students asked for help more frequently at the end than they did at the beginning. Again this suggests developing group cohesiveness.

Affective Concerns

Affective concerns include both the motivation for change and the students' attitudes toward writing. A focus on what the motivations for change are and how they function within the group provides insight into the teacher's role within this group. Mike's techniques, especially his question-asking and Rogerian reflection, provide a major motivation for change. He functions as a role model, a catalyst for change. He cannot escape control of the group, whether in the role of initiating or responding. The students imitate his specific forms and styles of communication, coming to provide motivation for change in self and others. Mike reinforces the types of behavior he is looking for.

The teacher's role as model has an effect on the group's responses. The students imitate both language and types of responses. Amy, acting as leader in a conference where Mike is not present, says, "I'll shut up now," an idiomatic expression that Mike often uses when he is present. Mike's deliberately casual and understated style reflects his belief that students are more likely to learn if they feel comfortable, and that students need to take responsibility for their own writing. At a level of more importance that teacher style, the students imitate types of responses that provide them with increased communication skills--both verbal and written. They expand their options of ways to express themselves; they learn to consider alternatives and select information; they learn to focus their attention; they learn what to

ask. As they learn to question, suggest, and respond to others, they learn to do it for themselves and in so doing increase their communication options.

As evidence for Mike's effect on the group responses, I separated Mike's responses for conferences 1 and 5 from the combined interaction counts for the group. Mike's rate of interaction (participation in all categories)--about 25%--falls midway between Bales' leadership profiles, which show an interaction rate of 52% for a directive leader and 14% for a nondirective leader. The most significant finding, however, is that Mike's interaction pattern does not change over the series of conferences. The change in group patterns, then, must come from changes in the students. Their individual profiles bear this out, as they increasingly come to resemble those of Mike's. Amy's rate of interaction, while high, decreases from 37% in conference 1 to 33% in conference 6. Becky's profiles are very similar to Amy's except for a greater decrease in the rate of interaction. In contrast, Sharon's rate of interaction increases from 3% in conference 1 to 22% in conference 6. Ken's rate of interaction increases from 6% in conference 1 to 11% in conference 6.

The rates of interaction are in keeping with the specialized group roles that emerged. Each member has a personal style of presenting and develops from this style a role within the group, one that develops over time, but not one that changes substantially. Sharon tends to support the others; Ken summarizes; Amy and Becky, using much of the talk time, perform a variety of functions while vying for the most prominent position in the group. This latter feature is most noticeable in the conferences where Mike is not present. A group hierarchy becomes established, in which each member is expected to continue in his or her position, and a sense of mutual obligation develops. Sharon and Ken come to depend on Amy and Becky for talk time, and Amy's and Becky's positions become pivotal. They influence the group more by their variations than does Sharon or Ken.

Amy comes to take over the leadership position when Mike is not present. She asks such directive questions as "Who's first?" and directs the discussion, though more by means of suggestions than by questioning or reflecting: "Go through and take out the central ideas. Highlight them." As Amy moves in this direction, Becky moves toward distractive comments: "Actually, I think I've been thinking about my doctor appointment this afternoon more than thinking about this right now." Ernest Bormann (1975) identifies this type of behavior as a typical attempt to gain attention and recognition by a powerful group member after a leadership position has not been attained. Bales differentiates in another way, claiming that some groups may have a task leader and a social leader (1970).

Sharon's profile indicates the type of role she came to play within the group. She frequently agreed and complied with others and often supported the longer comments of other members with "yeah" or "uh-huh." In addition, she would often echo the last word or two of another speaker, again indicating her role as that of listener and supporter. When Sharon did begin to make an independent comment, she was often interrupted--probably because group members had come to expect her to continue her supporting role. Sharon also made direct requests for help. She took suggestions seriously and then asked about how to implement the suggestions.

Ken's profile shows a preference toward giving suggestions (category 5). He would remain silent for long periods of time and then inject a comment that was a summary of what others had been saying, often to make a specific point about an opinion he had formed while listening. Ken was seldom interrupted when he offered a comment; group members expected something of substance when he spoke. This is in keeping with Bormann's (1975) comment on sex-role differences in groups: males tend to be more self-assertive than females.

Ken's manner in the group bore this out.

A close study of the transcripts reveal, however, that when he is there, Mike functions as the main influence on the group. Even though the students are responsible for making decisions about their writing, they look to him for suggestions. Stogdill (1974) cites numerous situations where the designated leader is not the actual leader of a group. Mike leads because he is the force for change in attitudes and in writing, the resourceful one, the one more independent in judgment--this in spite of the fact that he has a casual, self-effacing, nonthreatening manner. For example, he begins Conference 3 in this way:

> Shall we talk about the goal of the conference first? And then I'll try to shut up as much as possible. You're in a unique situation that you've all seen the same thing . . . . So, one of the things I think that might be helpful is for each of the writers to say, "Hey, here's what I think I saw, and here's what I think I might be trying to write about, here's what I've got going on." Then we--you can all kick in and say, "Well I saw this and thought about this, maybe this was really what was happening," er.. you know, whatever.

He gives a directive in the form of a question and mitigates specific suggestions with "I think" and "might," and then ends on the casual note of "you know, whatever." The evidence from the transcripts suggests that a supportive manner and use of mitigation do not undermine influence.

Because of Mike's position and his influence on the group, his primary function is to model. In addition to the techniques, he serves to integrate the comments of the other group members, selecting the central features from their discussion. He shows himself the teacher by his specialized knowledge of writing theory and process. It is clear that he has come to the conference with a general view of the writing process and general goals in his mind, and he applies that knowledge to the discussion at hand. Though not frequent or dominating, one of his comments or questions periodically serves to direct the discussion for several minutes, until he speaks again. His comments usually

come directly from the preceding discussion. Although he never demands power, in fact seems not to want it, the students give it to him. One of the most striking examples occurs during the Conference 2 when he asks if Becky should put herself into the essay. Amy asks him to clarify: "You mean like relate it more than just . . . ?" Mike replies, "Just a question.. it's not a suggestion," but the students treat his initial question with the force of an order. Amy agrees: "That might be a good idea," and goes on to suggest alternative ways in which Becky might put herself into the essay. Others pick up the discussion, and Mike's question directs discussion for several minutes. The students pattern their responses after Mike and work for his approval.

Mike's integrating function is especially noticeable toward the end of each 12-15 minute cycle. He summarizes the discussion, selecting the salient features for consideration by the writers, and then turns to the writer for final comments. His conference structure asks writers to summarize the discussion, but in fact they seldom do this. The failure of the writers to assume this function suggests that writers are not in a good position to perform this task after having been actively engaged in producing their texts, considering various alternatives, planning, and listening.

Certain responses, no matter who makes them, tend to function pivotally and encourage discussion, often changing the direction of the discussion. Some of the significant types of responses that Mike models for the students and that they begin to use include questioning techniques to help order and focus information, and Rogerian reflection to help increase self-awareness. Although occurring at a relatively low rate, they increase as the conferences progress. The rate of questioning increases from 4% in conference 1 to 13% in conference 6. Rogerian reflections (a part of category 6) increase even as the rate for all of category 6 decreases (from 48% in conference 1 to 22% in conference 6).

The Relationship of the Group Process to the Writing Process

During the discussion of one paper, the group functions in a way that parallels the writing process. To illustrate the relationship between group process and writing process, I will first examine parallels between the verbal process of communication and the written process of communication; I will then focus on group procedure as the starting point for this relationship, and finally I will focus on how the group functions in the development of writing abilities as specific writing concerns are discussed.

Within the 12- to 15-minute cycle that centers on each writer in each conference, group members behave in all the ways described in the literature on successful group processes, their behaviors becoming more skilled and forceful as the series of conferences proceeds. The significance here is the view of oral language problem-solving cognition as it relates to writing. Their interaction patterns have similarities to the writing process itself. First, there is a period of introduction, expansion, and elaboration--from the writer and then from group members. This corresponds to a time of prewriting when material and ideas are being generated. Second, there is a period of discussion of procedures--alternatives concerning voice, organization, audience, purpose, tone, and surface features. These procedures often come from the writer's statement of concerns, but may also arise from the group members. This period corresponds both to prewriting and to drafting. Third, there is a period of planning, during which the writer makes some decisions about which direction the paper will take. Especially in drafting conferences, these changes to be made in the existing text correspond to revision.

This general pattern of introduction and elaboration, followed by procedural issues, followed by planning may neatly unfold only once within the 12-15 minute cycle and may be primarily concerned with the paper as a whole.

Alternatively, it may be recursive, circling back several times to elaborate and encompass specific concerns about the paper.

Verb tenses provide one sign of the cycle. The first part--introduction, expansion, and elaboration--is most frequently in the past tense, recounting writing done, incidents experienced. The second part--alternative procedures--tends to move from the present tense, "I'm thinking this . . . ," to the future conditional tense, "If you did this, then . . . ." The third part--planning--is either in the conditional future tense or the future tense, "I'm going to. . . ." The verb tenses reveal how writers explain and analyze completed activities and develop specialized procedures for the future.

Different writers use verb tenses differently. Becky, with a good deal of writing anxiety, speaks in the past tense of her problems in writing: "Well, I had trouble . . . because whenever I think of a person I've had trouble with, I've already thought enough about it and I've hashed it over enough, and I ran into a dead end trying to find a topic," while Amy uses the past tense to explain her intentions in great detail: "I put in the first set that you could call a paragraph or whatever to show how what I started talking about was my old roommate."

Different writers also make different uses of the time spent discussing their own papers, indicating different learning styles. Some spend more time creating text verbally, some planning and discussing alternatives, some listening, observing, and asking for help.

I do not intend the direct analogy of the group process to the writing process to be more than a rough one; nevertheless, it does provide a general framework from which to examine the functions of the writer, the other group members, and the teacher. Of the various group functions, there is one that stands out: the two-way nature of communication is stressed. The writer functions as both speaker and audience, while the other group members function

both as audience (either implicit or explicit) and as speakers. Under this scheme reactions from the audience, which are always present in any communication situation, are immediate. The students build text collectively; this encourages them to build it individually at a later point.

Since the ultimate objective of the group conference is to increase students' ability to communicate in writing, the texts become the focus that follows the examination of the entire group process. Usually only one large concern gets translated into the revision, no matter how many concerns are discussed; this is the most obvious connection between the texts and the conference. The main change in Becky's paper on the people who place personal ads is one of voice. Her first draft contains numerous references to "these people," and "they." Her revision shifts to "we," and her opening sentence shows that she is no longer "peresecuting these people": "Out of loneliness, we fantasized a world where certain people are perfect for each other, know it immediately, and instantly have a beautiful relationship." Often, writers exhibit a period of disintegration and rebuilding. As Becky struggles with voice and tone, she develops problems with verb tense (beginning with "fanticized") that she did not have in the first draft. Writers may fail to develop the beginnings of good examples that were previously discussed--or they may leave out the examples altogether.

When writers introduce their pieces of writing to the group, they reveal not only their assumptions about writing ("I think you're technical like I am, Ken."), but also their own writing strengths and weaknesses ("I've got to get down to a central idea," and "I did not like it at all. So I started writing another one."). They state their intentions ("What I tried to do here was, like, write an essay.") and examine the content more thoroughly than they had done in writing. Although the content varies with the topic of the paper

and the attitude expressed in the papers changes as their attitude toward writing changes, their explanations generally exhibit certain personal characteristics that the other members of the group come to expect. For example, Amy always elaborates extensively upon what she has written, while Becky tends to apologize for the content and explain her difficulties; Ken is concise, and Sharon asks the group for help. The writers' styles and their degree of confidence vary widely. During the discussion, however, one common characteristic is noticeable. If the direction of exploration does not suit the writer's needs, the writer changes the direction. For example, when group members start listing ways that society builds up unrealistic expectations in people, Becky changes the focus back to the individuals: "I don't know if I want to get too far into where.. these come from. . . See, the people are lonely. I mean, they've got to be if they're advertising anything. They want to find a relationship."

When the group members function as readers, they give reactions to the paper--describing, reflecting, clarifying, questioning, evaluating, suggesting, supporting, or disagreeing. In describing, reflecting, and clarifying, they tell the writer how closely the intentions of the writer match the effects achieved in the reader. In this way the writers begin to understand how and when their writing is effective. When Amy says that her writing seems passive, Becky suppports her observation and suggests a reason for it: "It got too scientific. You took yourself out."

The content discussed by the group consists of the writer's subject matter and the writing concerns raised previously by Mike in the classroom--purpose, audience, organization, voice, tone, style, and surface features. The overriding group function is that of audience; all the group reactions are, at least implicitly, as audience. When audience is discussed directly, the reactions are explicit.

DISCUSSION

The writing conferences that I observed promoted active, experiential learning. They provided a supportive atmosphere that encouraged students to develop verbal group interaction skills and to apply those skills to their writing. As writers, students observed the difficulties and accomplishments of other writers. The group experience added to and expanded the individual experience of writing, which was still done in isolation, both before and after the conference. I began this study believing that small-group writing conferences were an effective means of teaching writing, and I am concluding with the same basic claim, now supported and enriched by the evidence from tapes, transcripts, papers, and the personal accounts of the participants.

This study indicates the basic pattern of the interaction of one writing group and the ways in which that pattern changed, moving toward a greater variety, risk, and forcefulness of discussion. Members of this group exhibited most of the behaviors predicted by small-group researchers: group members functioned in both the task and social-emotional areas, with responses in the social-emotional areas increasing as group cohesiveness developed. Group cohesiveness was demonstrated by the increase in responses carrying personal risk, the involvement in the task at hand, and the friendliness which group members felt for each other. The main difference between this group and many other types of task groups was the small amount of secondary tension. Disagreements did not reach a troublesome stage, probably because the group did not have to reach a concensus on how to procede with writing a revision. The final decision and the final product were left to the writer.

This study indicates the strong influence of the teacher on the group and the ways in which the writers' different personalities affected their roles within the group as well as the type of help they gave and received. Their

personal characteristics remained similar throughout the conferences, developing into a set of role expectations on the part of other group members, and changing gradually by expansion. The students came to have a very positive attitude toward the writing conferences. The students develped new means of interactions that were imitations of the teacher's style and verbal interactions; these actions increased continually as the quarter progressed. In spite of this development, however, the group functioned less efficiently without Mike present. This raises a question about the long range consequences for the students as writers. They began to internalize strategies, procedures, and audience responses; they were enthused about the kind of writing help that a group provides and may seek collaboration for later writing tasks. But this class could only provide a short-term effort at setting up a context for writing. Imagine this kind of activity from elementary school on, the powerful ways in which groups might function if this activity were a regular part of their writing experience. A limitation on the students' experiences and on this study is the short-term nature of the group experience.

This study suggests parallels between group process and writing process. The 12- to 15-minute cycle spent on each writer during each conference moved from a period of expansion to a period of discussion of alternatives to a period of planning. Students came with an accumulation of ideas about writing that they often did not know how to apply to specific writing situations. The teacher came with an accumulation of general principles of good writing that he applied during the group discussions of writing. Writers talked about their texts by explaining, expanding, exploring alternatives, planning, expressing dissatisfaction, and asking for help. Group comments on each writer's text included approving, expanding, suggesting, questioning, and disagreeing. In making all of these comments, the students functioned, either

implicitly or explicitly, as audience. Mike served as a role model, an agent for moving the discussion to a new stage, an integrater of group comments, and a summarizer. The subject matter was supplied by the students; the focus on various aspects of writing was supplied first by Mike and later by students.

Groups work because group skills are relevant to writing. The group interaction skills exhibited in the conferences are both speaking and writing skills: expanding text, explaining problems, discussing alternative procedures, planning, coming to understand and react to the needs of an audience, coming to say things in different ways. As these abilities develop in speaking, they are transferred, however slowly at times, to writing. As students experience a similar struggle with similar issues, sharing their writing and their speaking, their anxiety is diffused.

Groups provide two distinct types of evidence for determining writing development in students: their comments as writers and as audience, and their series of written products. Developments in discussion come before developments in written products. The written products alone represent a chronological series of examples which reflect, but usually lag behind, the whole verbal behavior. The written products are connected to the verbal behaviors in conference, to what the students were trying to do, to the suggestions made by other group members, and to the teacher's input. Conferences provide teachers with direct personal knowledge to combine with general knowledge of writing principles in order to help students. With the written product in its context of goals, struggles, and changes, teachers are in a better position to select relevant issues--to comment on successes, to note what was left out in the struggle of translation, and to personalize the teaching of writing. The central feature of a small-group writing conference is the breaking down of two kinds of isolation: speaking from writing and individual from group.

The group context provides the elements of a rhetorical situation. Arthur Applebee (1982) identifies "three domains of knowledge that interact in powerful ways to shape the text: knowledge of language, knowledge of topic, and knowledge of audience" (p. 365). The group reacts to all of these, providing the most help with knowledge of audience, since by reading the group becomes the audience and provides knowledge of itself. The group responses provide a model of an audience that students can internalize. The skilled leader can set up the group to respond in a way that mirrors what goes on in the mind of the literate writer who has internalized an audience as the apparatus for constant reflexive feedback. This mirroring provides something far more important to writing than help with any specific piece of writing: it provides a mechanism for immediate feedback. It teaches the writer to imagine and internalize the audience by actual negotiations among the group. The freedom to explore permits the involved writers to have some sense of the impact their written words have had on the group. When working with abstract concepts, such as the nature of the writer's audience, the group process approach is appropriate.

This study provides a basis from which to generalize about group process and writing process. Some of the variables of the writing conference are obvious: teacher and student personality, group structure, group size, paper assignments, meeting times and frequency, type of conference (prewriting, drafting), and aim of conference (evaluative, collaborative). Others are not so obvious: patterns, attitudes, talk time, and types of conversational initiation and response. Rather than attempt to control the variables, I examined what happens in one series of conferences, described the situation, and analyzed the results. We know that groups will operate according to the principles of small-group behavior. Teachers will model behaviors that students will imitate--consciously or unconsciously. As we come to understand

more about writing groups and as we make greater use of them, we better our chances of enriching and enculturating inexperienced writers as they develop their ability to communicate.

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Appendix A

Bales' Interaction Process Analysis:

Social-Emotional Area: Positive reactions
1) Shows solidarity, raises other's status, gives help, reward.
2) Shows tension release, jokes, laughs, shows satisfaction.
3) Agrees, shows passive acceptance, understands, concurs, complies.

Task Area: Attempted Answers
4) Gives suggestion, direction, implying autonomy for other.
5) Gives opinion, evaluation, analysis, expresses feeling, wish.
6) Gives orientation, information, repeats, clarifies, confirms.

Task Area: Questions
7) Asks for orientation, information, repetition, confirmation.
8) Asks for opinion, evaluation, analysis, expression of feeling.
9) Asks for suggestion, direction, possible ways of action.

Social-Emotional Area: Negative Reactions
10) Disagrees, shows passive rejection, formality, withholds help.
11) Shows tension, asks for help, withdraws out of field.
12) Shows antagonism, deflates other's status, defends or asserts self.

Appendix B

An Example of Bales' IPA Applied to the Transcripts from the Small-Group Writing Conferences:

(Sharon begins the discussion of her rough draft on the topic of her old dance school:)

S: Well, maybe, I think that I might do.. that I'm probably saying too much descriptions here../ (5--gives opinion) that, you know, it's kind of.. you know we were all just, you know.. turn left here/ (6--gives orientation) turn right../ (6--gives orientation) that kind of../ (no category--incomplete)

B: I.. I got the feeling it was too scientific./ (5--gives opinion) I mean your first one was so beautiful../ (1--shows solidarity) it was just.. it was showing just your images of.. you know, the.. descriptions of beautiful things../ (6--gives orientation) you don't have to include every single room or everything../ (4--gives suggestion) the decor of every room.. or something../ (4--gives suggestion) I wanted.. I wanted you to get back to the more personalized../ (4--gives suggestion) you got.. really scientific/ (5--gives opinion) with you.. your feeling that you had to get descriptions down../ (6--gives orientation) but I.. I don't know../ (5--expresses feeling) it.. I wanted../ (no category-- incomplete)

K: Describe the place more on the whole./ (4--gives suggestion)

S: Yeah./ (3--agrees)

APPENDIX C

Group Responses as Categorized by Bales' IPA:

Number of Responses

Bales' Categories		Conf 1	Conf 2	Conf 3	Conf 4	Conf 5	Conf 6
Shows solidarity	1	5	15	19	15	25	27
Shows tension release	2	10	4	23	34	25	103
Agrees	3	43	177	320	158	261	138
Gives suggestion	4	29	212	59	123	120	95
Gives opinion	5	159	253	319	158	320	140
Gives orientation	6	243	373	515	250	370	185
Asks for orientation	7	7	57	72	35	64	72
Asks for opinion	8	15	23	29	28	55	13
Asks for suggestion	9	0	12	3	20	15	20
Disagrees	10	0	26	18	12	15	24
Shows tension	11	1	22	3	12	14	7
Shows antagonism	12	0	1	0	10	20	18
	Total	510	1175	1380	855	1303	842

Percentage of Responses

Bales' Categories		Conf 1	Conf 2	Conf 3	Conf 4	Conf 5	Conf 6
Shows solidarity	1	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	3%
Shows tension release	2	2%	0.3%	2%	4%	2%	12%
Agrees	3	8%	15%	23%	19%	20%	16%
Gives suggestion	4	6%	18%	4%	14%	9%	11%
Gives opinion	5	31%	22%	23%	19%	25%	17%
Gives orientation	6	48%	32%	37%	30%	28%	22%
Asks for orientation	7	1%	5%	5%	4%	5%	9%
Asks for opinion	8	3%	2%	2%	3%	4%	2%
Asks for suggestion	9	-	1%	0.2%	2%	1%	2%
Disagrees	10	-	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%
Shows tension	11	0.2%	2%	0.2%	1%	1%	1%
Shows antagonism	12	-	-	-	1%	2%	2%

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